

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PDEV, UK

SUBJECT: CALLAGHAN ON DEVOLUTION

REFERENCE: LONDON 12741

SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER CALLAGHAN, VISITING SCOTLAND, HAS LAUNCHED A LABOR LEADERSHIP CAMPAIGN TO QUASH A POSSIBLY DAMAGING ANTI-DEVOLUTIONIST REBELLION WITHIN THE PARTY. DISSIDENT BACK-BENCHERS HAVE BEEN WARNED NOT TO OBSTRUCT THE PROGRESS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S PLANS FOR DEVOLUTION. END SUMMARY

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1. PRIME MINISTER CALLAGHAN'S CURRENT THREE-DAY VISIT TO SCOTLAND REPRESENTS THE FIRST STEP BY THE GOVERNMENT TO QUELL THE ANTI-DEVOLUTIONIST RUMBLINGS WITHIN THE LABOR PARTY (REFTEL). THE TRIP AND THE PRIME MINISTER'S COMMENTS BEFORE THE SCOTTISH COUNCIL OF THE LABOR PARTY AUGUST 24 UNDERSCORE HIS POLITICAL COMMITMENT TO SIGNIFICANT DEVOLUTION FOR THE REGION AND SERVE AS A WARNING TO WAYWARD BACK-BENCHERS TO GET INTO LINE. MINISTERS ARE DETERMINED TO PUSH THE LEGISLATION THROUGH THE FORTHCOMING SESSION OF PARLIAMENT, HE DECLARED. "SCOTLAND IS ENTITLED TO A DECISION AND TO KNOW WHERE IT STANDS; OBSTRUCTION IN ORDER TO PREVENT A DECISION WOULD BE DEEPLY RESENTED IN SCOTLAND."

2. WHILE PROVING HIMSELF CONCERNED ABOUT DEVOLUTION, THE PRIME MINISTER NEVERTHELESS OUTLINED LIMITS TO HIS EXUBERANCE. THE POWER OF A DEVOLVED SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY TO RAISE REVENUE WAS INCLUDED IN THE ORIGINAL WHITE PAPER BUT DROPPED IN THE SUPPLEMENTARY DOCUMENT. BY WAY OF EXPLANATION, CALLAGHAN TOLD HIS AUDIENCE, "THE BASIC UNITY OF THE UNITED KINGDOM REQUIRES THAT REVENUE DERIVED FROM ALL PARTS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM SHALL BE USED TO FINANCE THE NEEDS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM AS A WHOLE." USING THE TERM "UNITED KINGDOM" THREE TIMES IN ONE SENTENCE SEEMS TO MAKE THE POINT.

3. BY HIS SECOND DAY IN SCOTLAND, CALLAGHAN'S DECLARATIONS ON DEVOLUTION BECAME OVERSHADOWED BY THE WHITEHALL ANNOUNCEMENT THAT THERE ARE NOW 1.5 MILLION UNEMPLOYED IN BRITAIN, WITH MORE THAN 10 PERCENT OF THE IDLE CONCENTRATED IN THE GLASGOW AREA. THE FOCUS OF HIS TRIP QUICKLY SHIFTED TO THIS PRACTICAL AND PRESSING ISSUE AND AWAY FROM LOFTY, CONSTITUTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS.

4. COMMENT: CALLAGHAN'S FIRST EFFORT TO CLOSE PARTY RANKS ON THE DEVOLUTION ISSUE WENT SOFTLY, SOFTLY. YET, IT IS CLEAR THAT THE LABOR LEADERSHIP IS PREPARED TO BRING ITS FULL WEIGHT TO BEAR ON THE THREE SCORE OR SO DISSENTERS WHO COULD OBSTRUCT PASSAGE OF THE BILL. WITH LITTLE IN COMMON OTHERWISE AND UNITED ONLY IN THEIR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ANXIETY ABOUT DEVOLUTION, THE RELUCTANT BACK-BENCHERS WILL FACE ARGUMENTS THAT THEY ARE SUBVERTING PARTY SOLIDARITY, UNDERCUTTING THE NEW PRIME MINISTER, BETRAYING AN ESTABLISHED PARTY PRINCIPLE, THREATENING THE COLLAPSE OF THE LABOR GOVERNMENT, AND JEOPARDIZING THE INTEGRITY OF THE KINGDOM. SUCH HEAT IS LIKELY TO MELT THE STEELY RESOLUTION OF AT LEAST SOME RECALCITRANT MPS.

ARMSTRONG

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